



# New River Land Protection Planning Study for a Proposed National Wildlife Refuge

Planning Update 1, June 2005

## Greetings

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is initiating a planning process to study the feasibility of establishing a National Wildlife Refuge at the New River for the management and continuing protection of fish, wildlife, and plant habitats. This is the first in a series of Planning Updates that will be issued for this planning process. Through the Updates, we share information with you and seek your involvement in the study. Your input is very important. It helps us gather information and identify issues affecting you, your community, and the natural resources of the New River area. If you do not wish to receive the Updates, please let us know through one of the points of contact listed on the last page.

## Land Protection Planning Initiation

The New River Bottoms is a very special place. It provides habitat for a variety of wildlife including waterfowl (particularly the Aleutian cackling goose) shorebirds, neotropical songbirds, raptors, anadromous fish, amphibians, and rare plants.

The New River begins where Floras Creek meets the sand dunes and turns north on the east side of the foredune system. Floras, Langlois, Morton, Butte, and Bethel Creeks and other

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*The New River Bottoms as viewed from the south looking north.*



*Aleutian cackling geese foraging in sheep pasture.*

*Photos: David S. Pitkin, USFWS*

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smaller streams flow west across the New River Bottoms through a mosaic of pasture-land and freshwater wetland habitats, including sloughs, lakes, marshes, oxbows, and shrub swamps.

Many upland areas and seasonal wetland habitats are managed as pastures for sheep and cattle grazing. These short grass habitats are used by a number of resident and migratory wildlife species, including Aleutian cackling geese, other waterfowl, and shorebirds.

This Planning Update initiates our planning process and study for a proposal to help protect these natural resources by establishing a National Wildlife Refuge at New River. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) is proceeding with the study through our planning process to determine if we can assist in the management, protection and restoration of these resources.

### Notice of Open House for the New River Land Protection Study

You are invited to attend an Open House on June 16, 2005, to learn about the New River Refuge Planning Study and how it will proceed. This meeting will provide you with an opportunity to meet local and regional representatives from the National Wildlife Refuge System, learn about the missions and goals of the Refuge System, and get involved in the planning process in its earliest stage. You can ask questions, get answers, and comment on the issues and

**Date:** June 16, 2005

**Time:** from 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.

scope of the study in an informal setting. Refuge planners, biologists, and managers will be available to discuss the planning process, the land easement/acquisition program, and the Refuge System. We also want to learn from you about how the current land practices have benefited fish and wildlife in the area. Your comments and questions will be considered during preparation of the refuge planning documents.

**Location:** Blanco Middle School  
48241 Highway 101  
Langlois, Oregon 97450



*Whimbrels make extensive use of short grass habitats within the New River Bottoms during spring migration.*  
Photo: Ramiel Papish, USFWS



*Aleutian cackling geese grazing beside sheep.*  
Photo: David S. Pitkin USFWS

## What Area Is the Service Studying?

The Service has identified a 5,900-acre study area encompassing diverse and valuable upland and wetland habitats within the New River Bottoms in southern Coos County and northern Curry County, Oregon, near the town of Langlois.

The New River Study Area is bounded on the south by the Boice-Cope County Park, on the west by the Pacific Ocean and the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) New River Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC), on the north by Croft Lake, and on the east by U.S. Highway 101 (Please see the map of the Study Area).

This area was identified because of its rich fish and wildlife values which have been supported by ranching practices, and because of the high potential for restoring native habitats.

## What Fish and Wildlife Species and Habitats Are Found in the New River Study Area?

The New River Study Area is located within the New River Bottoms (Bottoms) wetland/pastureland complex which supports the largest spring migration and staging area for Aleutian cackling geese in Oregon. More than 40,000 geese have been documented using the Bottoms in recent years and their use has increased from just a few days to nearly three months each year. Nutritional requirements for the geese are very high while in the New River area, because it is believed they migrate nonstop to the Aleutian Islands after leaving New River.

In addition to Aleutian cackling geese, other waterfowl are numerous along New River and throughout the seasonal wetlands and pasturelands of the Bottoms. Notably, this area is one of only four tundra swan wintering sites along the Oregon Coast. Shorebird use of the Bottoms is significant as a migration stopover with more than 100,000 western sandpipers and 2,000 whimbrels recorded on a single day on one ranch.

The Refuge Study Area also contains some active dunes designated Critical Habitat for the federally listed threatened western snowy plover. The



*Aerial view of managed short grass habitats and native wetlands within the New River Bottoms. Photo: David S. Pitkin, USFWS*

New River, Floras Creek, and the other smaller streams harbor strong runs of wild anadromous fish including coho salmon, chinook salmon, steelhead, cutthroat trout, and Pacific lamprey. Federally listed threatened bald eagles nest just outside the Study Area and their foraging territory covers most of the Bottoms.

Federally listed endangered California brown pelicans use the beach and New River for roosting, and federally delisted American peregrine falcons are found throughout the Study Area nearly year-round. Neotropical migrant songbirds utilize the upland and wetland habitats for breeding and migration. The wetlands within the Refuge Study Area serve as important breeding habitat for amphibians and a small population of mallards and wood ducks.

Prior to EuroAmerican settlement, a vast complex of wetlands was present, including sizeable bogs containing rare plants such as darlingtonia and western lily which is now federally listed as threatened. If the Service establishes a New River National Wildlife Refuge and purchases either conservation easements or fee title from willing sellers, livestock grazing programs will be maintained in many areas to continue protection of existing wildlife values and provide forage and sanctuary for Aleutian cackling geese, waterfowl, and shorebirds. There would also be some opportunities to restore the historic diversity of freshwater wetlands and riparian habitats to benefit numerous species of fish, wildlife, and plants.

## Why Do These Habitats Need Further Protection as a National Wildlife Refuge?

The Oregon coast is experiencing a rapid increase in residential development, particularly within the corridor between Highway 101 and the Pacific Ocean. The New River bottoms and adjacent Cape Blanco area constitute the largest unfragmented grassland habitats remaining along the entire Oregon and Washington coasts. These areas, managed primarily as livestock ranches, provide vital habitat to unusually diverse fish and wildlife populations. Development within the New River Bottoms would increase habitat fragmentation, decrease existing habitat values, and reduce ranching practices beneficial to wildlife species such as Aleutian cackling geese, shorebirds, bats and some songbird species.

The mosaic of wetlands, grasslands, and forested areas within the New River Bottoms supports perhaps the most diverse group of terrestrial wildlife species on the Oregon coast. Targeted habitat restoration and continued ranching through acquisition of conservation easements will be critical in maintaining and enhancing these unique habitats and the species they support. For example, land management practices that maintain short grass habitats in key goose use areas will encourage current use

patterns of Aleutian cackling geese within the New River Bottoms. Conversely, any reduction in key short grass habitats through development or other changes in land use would likely decrease Aleutian cackling goose use within the New River Bottoms and increase depredation on private lands elsewhere in the southern Oregon Coast region. Restoring native wetland habitats within the Bottoms will benefit rare and declining plant species, anadromous fish such as coho salmon, steelhead and cutthroat trout, and many migratory and resident bird species.

Establishing a New River National Wildlife Refuge would allow the Refuge System to:

- Provide high quality forage and sanctuary on public lands for more than half of the delisted Aleutian cackling goose population;
- Help reduce Aleutian cackling goose depredation concerns within key goose use areas through purchase of conservation easements;
- Protect and restore habitat for native anadromous fish populations;
- Enhance and contribute to existing habitat protection efforts by BLM, Oregon Department of Parks and Recreation, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, and The Nature Conservancy; and
- Help local landowners and communities continue to manage large tracts of land for the benefit of fish and wildlife and future generations.

## What Is the National Wildlife Refuge System?

The National Wildlife Refuge System is the world's largest and most diverse collection of public lands set aside specifically for the conservation of fish, wildlife, and plants.

There are 545 refuges, established from the Arctic Ocean to the South Pacific, from Maine to the Caribbean.

This system of lands encompasses more than 96 million acres of land and water and at least one national wildlife refuge can be found in every state.

*The Blue Goose was adopted as the symbol of the National Wildlife Refuge System. The Blue Goose has marked refuge boundaries, entrance signs, brochures, and exhibits since 1936.*



### The Mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System

The mission of the Refuge System is to administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management and, where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans.

## What is the Land Protection Planning Process?

The Service initiates the land protection planning process to study habitat protection proposals. Proposals must demonstrate that adding habitat or lands to the National Wildlife Refuge System is the best way to achieve long term protection. The process is then carried out as follows.

- The planning process integrates three components: detailed study and planning, extensive public involvement, and environmental compliance.
- The documentation that evolves from the process includes an environmental compliance document, a land protection plan, and a conceptual management plan.
- These draft documents are provided to the public for review and comment. Comments are considered as we develop final documents.
- Based on refuge boundary alternatives presented in the final documents, Service

decision makers will select an alternative for implementation. The alternatives can range from no action to including all or part of the study area lands within a refuge project boundary.

- If part or all of the lands are approved for inclusion, a refuge project boundary is established and the planning process is complete.

A refuge project boundary defines an area where the Service can acquire land (fee title acquisition) or interest in land (easements). It is Service policy to acquire land only from landowners who are willing sellers. Acquisitions are subject to funding availability.

Your participation is welcomed and encouraged throughout the process. We would like to meet with you, listen to your ideas, and learn about your concerns. The information gathering or "scoping" phase of this project begins with the issuance of this planning update. We look forward to your early and continued involvement in the planning process.

### New River Land Protection Planning (Refuge) Study Schedule

<u>Planning Step</u>	<u>Target Date</u>
Study Initiation, Issue Identification, Information Gathering, Begin Scoping	June 2005
Public Open House	June 16, 2005
Your Issues and Comments Should Be Received by This Date. Review of Public Comments Begins.	July 8, 2005
Planning Documents Available for Public Review and Comment	October 2005
Public Comments on Planning Documents Due	November 2005
Issue Notice of Decision	January 2006

*Dates are tentative and can change as the study progresses.*



*Great blue heron, Jean Harrison, USFWS*

### **How Do I Contact the Service or Provide Comments?**

We would like to hear your ideas and discuss them at the Open House scheduled for June 16, 2005. If you cannot attend but still wish to share your ideas, concerns, and questions, please send them by July 8, 2005, for consideration during the development of the planning documents. Please send your written comments to Cathy Osugi or Amy Wing, Refuge Planners.

via mail: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
Division of Refuge Planning  
911 N.E. 11<sup>th</sup> Avenue  
Portland, Oregon 97232-4181

via fax: (503) 231-6187

or via e-mail:

[FW1PlanningComments@fws.gov](mailto:FW1PlanningComments@fws.gov)

(Please use "New River" in the subject.)

Call Cathy Osugi or Amy Wing toll free at (877) 312-1751 if you have any questions.

### **For information on land acquisition contact:**

Georgia Shirilla, Chief, Acquisition Branch  
Division of Realty  
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
911 N.E. 11<sup>th</sup> Avenue  
Portland, Oregon 97232-4181

Phone: (503) 231-2236 or  
toll free (800) 662-8933  
Fax: (503) 231-6161

### **For information on the Oregon Coast National Wildlife Refuge Complex contact:**

Roy W. Lowe, Project Leader  
Oregon Coast National Wildlife Refuge Complex  
2127 SE Marine Science Drive  
Newport, Oregon 97365-5258

Phone: (541) 867-4550  
Fax: (541) 867-4551



U.S. Department of the Interior  
Fish and Wildlife Service  
911 N.E. 11<sup>th</sup> Avenue  
Portland, Oregon 97232-4181

*Address correction requested*

### ***What's inside?***

Learn about a proposal to establish a National Wildlife Refuge in the New River area and how you can participate in the planning process.



Visit the Oregon Coast National Wildlife Refuge Complex website at:  
<http://www.fws.gov/pacific/oregoncoast/>